Economic Rivalries

There were economic conflicts between Germany and Britain from 1890 onwards. Since 1871 Germany had been experiencing a period of rapid industrialization, and by 1890 the products of her industry were competing with British manufactures everywhere in the globe and German merchant ships threatened Britain's carrying trade.

There were also economic struggles between Germany and France. In 1870 France had already lost two of her coal producing provinces--Alsace and Lorraine to Germany. From 1871 onwards, France had to import coal from other countries. Thus France had to compete with Germany in Morocco because the place was rich in mineral resources.

Germany and Austria also rivalled with Russia in the Balkans for commercial privileges. As early as 1888 Germany began to build a railway in the area. Austria regarded the area as a field for profitable investment and as a big market for her manufactured goods. Russia also hoped to control the area because half of her exports passed through this area.

A Minor Cause

Undoubtedly economic rivalries played a considerable part in creating international tensions in the 43 years before the First World War. As a matter of fact, the economic rivalries have been much exaggerated. The commercial rivalry between Germany and Russia in the Balkans was not keen, for Russia was not yet a fully industrialized nation with a surplus of products to be sold abroad. The trade rivalry between Britain and Germany had also eased off in the ten years before the war because they developed their markets in different parts of the world -- Britain within her own Empire, and Germany on the continent of Europe. Thus economic rivalries played a minor part in causing the First World War.

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